

GALLIPOLIS JOURNAL.

Published by James Harper.]

"Truth and Justice."

[At \$1.50 in Advance.]

Volume XV.--Number 48.

GALLIPOLIS, OHIO, OCTOBER 31, 1850.

Whole Number 776.

THE JOURNAL.

Is published every Thursday morning
BY JAMES HARPER.
In Telegraph Building, Public Square.

TERMS:
I copy one year, paid in advance, \$1.50
" " if paid within the year, 2.00
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Letter from Havana.

We learn from a slip from the office of the Charleston Courier that the steamer Isabella arrived at that port on Saturday last, with dates from Havana to the 8th inst. A letter to the Courier, from Havana, of that date, says:

Quite an excitement prevails in the city of Havana, caused by the rumored intelligence of another invasion of the Island. Reports are in circulation that there are some six thousand men congregated at some point in the United States, and were ready to embark for Cuba on the 27th ultimo. So that they are in daily expectation of a landing.

The siege of the Island has been raised and the militia disbanded. Officers of the Government have searched all the houses of the volunteers, and have taken all their arms. This has caused a serious difficulty between the citizen Spaniards, who took up arms and enlisted for the Government, and the Captain General. It is said he began to fear them, therefore he has taken away their arms. The above constitutes the news of the city, and is the general topic of discussion.

Business is prostrated by the expected invasion, and the excited and disturbed position of the inhabitants render trade and commercial operations dull and languid.

The last sales of molasses were at 2 1/2 rs. There is very little left in the hands of dealers, and they are asking higher prices.

There have been no cases of cholera in the city and environs for some time; but the disease still lingers in the interior, and has also appeared on the south side.

The naval and land forces in the island are being augmented considerably. Several more vessels and steamers of war are shortly expected here.

AFRICAN SPARTANS.—Travellers in Southern Africa have often praised the beautiful and symmetrical forms of the native inhabitants, and the people really deserve the encomiums. As they generally go nearly naked, their bodies appear as they really are; and among thousands of native Zulus whom I have seen, I do not remember to have met with one marked by any important congenital deformity. Deformed persons are said to be equally rare among several tribes of South Africa; but the explanation of this fact is by no means creditable to the moral character of the inhabitants. It appears to be their custom to destroy at birth all maimed, deformed and defective children. This work of destruction is done very secretly; and hence, in this country, we never see infants floating down our rivers, nor exposed in fields and forests to the rapacity of birds and wild beasts. When a deformed infant is to be put out of the way its mouth and nostrils are filled with mud, ashes or grease till life is extinct, then it is quietly buried out of sight.—*Puritan.*

MR. PAINE, THE GAS MAN.—He is not satisfied with turning water into gas. He has now discovered a means of navigating the ocean without wind or steam. This is his discovery:

I have succeeded in making certain bodies repellent or repulsive to water, when immersed in it. For instance.—The whole surface of a vessel's bottom and sides, (of a peculiar form) from the stern post to the broadest cross-section, has, by a peculiar electrical state, a repulsive action upon the fluid, which buoy it up, and consequently the vessel has an onward motion so long as this electrical action continues. This electrical action is furnished and continued by magnetic electricity, and if the vessel's course is in a circle, her motion will be perpetual."

☞ The population of Ireland is the poorest, and the church the wealthiest, in Europe.

THE LIFE OF SILAS TALBOT.

A Commodore in the Navy of the U. States.

BY HENRY T. TUCKERMAN.

Mr. Tuckerman has rendered an excellent service to our historical literature by the publication of this pleasant and well-written volume. It was prepared, in the first instance, as one of the series of American Biography edited by President Sparks. Upon the discontinuance of that work, Mr. Tuckerman was advised by the editors to publish his sketch in a separate volume, and he has certainly shown good judgment in complying with the suggestion. It will occupy an honorable rank among the numerous memoirs which have swarmed from the American press, and increase the reputation of the author as a tasteful and agreeable writer.

Commodore Talbot was the son of a Massachusetts farmer. Deprived of his parents at an early age, he was thrown at once upon his own resources. With an innate spirit of adventure, he sought his fortune upon the sea. Entering as a cabin-boy on board one of the coasting craft of Rhode Island, he soon rose in his profession, and became the owner of a handsome property. This was increased by successful mercantile speculations, until at the breaking out of the Revolution, he was in the enjoyment of a full share of worldly prosperity and surrounded by the charms of congenial domestic relations. He was not however to be tempted to repose while his services could be useful to his country. Soon after the battle of Lexington he received a commission from the State of Rhode-Island, and immediately marched, with three volunteer regiments, to the American camp in the vicinity of Boston. After the city was evacuated by the British, Talbot offered his services to convey the American fleet from New-London to Providence. Having performed this duty with eminent promptness and ability, he accompanied the army to New York. One of his first exploits after his arrival was his attack on a British frigate in the North River, the circumstances of which are thus related by Mr. Tuckerman:

COMMODORE TALBOT'S FIRE-SHIP.

The lovely harbor of this now great metropolis then offered a scene of rare and exciting interest. Riding at anchor in the vicinity of Staten Island, appeared the British fleet, with the army under Lord Howe. Every spar and line of cordage in those swarming battle-ships, was defined to the eye of the distant spectator, against the lucid azure of the sky; and, on quiet nights, reflected to the gaze of the boatmen that haunted the adjacent shore. Their dark, massive hulls and scowling cannon wore a portentous aspect, and seemed to cast long and prophetic shadows upon the free waters into which they had ruthlessly introduced—significant of the years of bitter trial of which they were ominous harbingers.

Upon the heights of Brooklyn, at York Island, and Paulus Hook, rose the newly-heaped batteries of the Americans. Never smiled that lovely bay more cheerfully than during those clear days of that eventful Spring. More solitary than at present, with its constantly plying steamers and forest of shipping, the position of the belligerents was plainly obvious. The comparative silence that hung over the broad waters, the fast-skimming clouds that, for a moment, darkened their crystal sheen, and the occasional furrows raised by sudden breezes that swept across them, stimulated the imagination of the lonely enthusiast who, from some isolated point, looked forth and mused upon the landscape.

It was evident that neither party had, as yet, determined upon its course. The considerate, on both sides, felt the importance of a successful blow, at the existent juncture; yet the actual state of the colonial defenses was but partially known to their opponents, and a premature maneuvering might occasion temporary discomfiture, even in that well-appointed squadron. On the other hand, it was of the highest moment that the Americans should be assured of the readiness of our troops to cope with their formidable invaders. It was useful that the spell of vague alarm should be, in a measure, broken, which had been inspired by the presence of those destructive engines, whose thunders seem to gather new potency from their long quiescence; whose shrouds and decks bristled with pikes and bayonets, and whose black and heavy sides contrasted vividly with the red hues of the soldiers' uniforms, grouped thickly at the port-holes and on the taffrails, as if impatient to pour forth upon the

land so invitingly spread below and around. To one gallant heart, this inaction was especially irksome. Captain Talbot had obtained the command of a fire-ship, and lay directly before the city, awaiting orders. To secure a more efficient position, and the better to disguise his purpose, he took advantage of a light wind, ascended the Hudson fifteen miles, and anchored just above fort Washington.

For three days, in this romantic spot, he quietly awaited an opportune moment for action. On the one side, the banks of the noble river sloped gradually upward, half-covered with low cedars, whose dark umbrage already wore the freshening tints of Spring; on the other, like natural fortifications, rose the gray and upright rocks of the tuffed palisades. Few dwellings were then visible; the ripple of the water on the pebbly shore was audible in the lull of the wind, and the tranquil and sequestered beauty of the scene gave no hint of the deadly preparations then making on board the unwarlike craft that swung so gently at her moorings. The lapse of a few hours after Captain Talbot had chosen his anchorage, evidenced the sagacity of his movements. Three of the enemy's ships, in order to protect the left of their army, in case of need, had shifted their ground from the harbor to a spot about half way between the mouth of the Hudson and the fire-ship. Orders were therefore soon ordered to the latter to make a night attack. She was filled with combustibles, and besmeared with turpentine. Several trains of powder were laid; and one of the crew was easily induced to strip himself, and lie down upon deck, with a lighted match, ready, at a moment's warning, to ignite the vessel.

At two o'clock in the morning they weighed anchor, and dropped slowly down with the tide. The nearest of three ships was the Asia of sixty-four guns, whose tall spars and towering hull no sooner loomed upon the eager gaze of Captain Talbot's hardy band, than they steered directly for her broadside. Unsuspecting of any danger, it was but a moment before her little adversary had flung her grappling irons, that the Asia fired; and then a scene ensued that baffles description. From the depth, as it were, of profound silence, there echoed the reverberation of cannon, the cries of the wounded, and the piercing shouts of alarm and revenge. In an instant the darkness of a cloudy night gave place to a red flashing glare that revealed the fort, the waters and the fields, with the distinctness of noonday; and brought into vivid relief the huge vessels of war now alive with their startled crews, who hastened to the relief of the Asia; some pouring water on the rising flames, others disengaging the fire-ship from her side, and not a few intent at the guns, which hurled an incessant shower of balls at the boat in which the daring originator of this sudden conflagration, was propelled by his brave men toward the nearest shore. Although lighted in their aim by a pyramid of fire, of all the shot from the three vessels, but two struck the crowded bark of the fugitives. Captain Talbot, however, in his anxiety to render the experiment certain, had lingered among the burning timbers of the fire-ship, and was the last to escape, the seamen who applied the match having, according to a previous understanding, immediately jumped overboard and been picked up by his expectant comrades. When, therefore, the boat reached the Jersey shore in safety, the appearance of the gallant leader was frightful and his sufferings intense. His skin was blistered from head to foot, his dress almost entirely consumed, and his eye-sight gone.

We soon after find him as a Major in the Army, conducting with signal gallantry, in

THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND.

When the French fleet, under Count d'Estaing, appeared off Rhode Island, toward the close of July, sanguine hopes were naturally excited that the enemy would be driven from the State. An expedition planned to effect this desirable object the preceding autumn, while General Spencer was in command, after having been partially equipped, was abandoned for reasons that have never been satisfactorily explained. A second attempt was now decided upon by General Sullivan, who, on the 9th of August left Providence and assumed command at Tiverton. The Council of War ordered out the whole military force of the State for twenty days. The French fleet had an encounter with the British, under Lord Howe, off Point Judith, and

did not return to the assistance of the Americans until the 20th of the month. A violent storm (yet traditional at Newport, from the circumstances that the windows of the town were encrusted with salt, deposited by the sea-water borne inland by the tempest,) separated the fleets, and neither gained any obvious advantage. Meantime it became necessary for our army to cross over to the island where the enemy were stationed. At this crisis General Sullivan availed himself of the energetic aid of Captain Talbot, to collect and prepare in as brief a time as possible, a sufficient number of boats to insure the safe and rapid embarkation of the troops. Invigorated by the respite from toil and suffering he had enjoyed, and his patriotic sentiment revived by a sojourn with those most near and dear to him, as well as by the daily spectacle of privation and anxiety exhibited by his neighbors and kindred—we can readily imagine the zest with which he mounted his horse and rode, day and night, beside dispatching expresses over an area of fifty miles around the country, for ship builders, smiths, and carpenters, in pursuance of this design. In an incredible short time, eighty-six flat-bottom boats, each fitted to carry 100 men, were in readiness. They were called by candle-light in an open field; and so weary had the indefatigable overseer of the enterprise become, that he enjoyed a refreshing sleep under one of the boats, notwithstanding the clank of hammers above his head. The embarkation commenced on Sunday, the 9th of August. The light corps to which Major Talbot was attached, marched directly down the island toward Newport, until within cannon-shot of the British lines. Colonel Laurens then directed him to proceed alone and reconnoiter. Arrived in sight of the enemy's outposts, he decied three artillery men, in a garden gathering vegetables. He instantly sprang his horse over the wall, and threatened them with instant death if they stirred. Not doubting that he was a British officer, they apologized for their absence from the fort, and delivered up their hangers. The Major coolly drove them along the road before him, and sent them to his commanding officer as prisoners of war. The excellent prospects of our army, however, was destined soon to be destroyed, as already hinted, for, on the same day, from the top of Col. Weaver's house, the British fleet was visible in the offing; they stood for Newport, and anchored outside the harbor; but when on the following day, the French fleet went to attack them, they slipped their cables and hastened to sea. Count d'Estaing gave chase, but the gale ensued, and he eventually returned crippled; and on the 22d sailed for Boston, to convey two of their ships that had been disabled in the encounter. Deprived of his co-operation, and hourly expecting the return of the British fleet with reinforcement, General Sullivan saw no alternative but a seasonable retreat; and although this was at last most judiciously affected, a severe action preceded, in which the bravery and skill of our troops have scarcely received from the annalist the deserved meed of praise. Gen. Lafayette, on his last visit to this country, declared his opinion that it was the best fought battle during the war.—He was an eye witness, having arrived on the field from Boston, whither he had hastened to induce Count d'Estaing to return to the assistance of Rhode Island. If he had done so, there is every probability that the British would have all been taken prisoners. The testimony of Col. Trumbull, who had volunteered his services as aid-de-camp to Gen. Sullivan, is to the same effect. His account of the action is graphic and impressive. He was sent at day-break to Col. Wigglesworth, of the rear-guard, on Quaker or Windmill Hill, with orders to withdraw his troops. In so doing, Trumbull describes himself as moving up a long gradual acclivity, in the very line of fire; first a round shot or two dropped near and bounded on; then he met Col. Townsend, with his arm off; next Capt. Walker bade him farewell as he was carried by in a dying state; and a moment after, a shower of grape fell around him like hail. On reaching the scene of action, the gallant Colonel shouted to the envoy, "Don't speak—I know your errand." "Do you see those troops crossing to your rear?" asked Trumbull in reply. "Yes, they are Americans."—"No, Sir, they are Germans; mark their dress is blue and yellow, not buff. They are coming to intercept your retreat. Retire instantly!" and the order was reluctantly obeyed.

The action of this memorable day was commenced by Major Talbot.—The British pursued Gen. Sullivan to Butt's Hill, at the north of the island. Lieut. Col. Laurens, with his detachment, took charge of the rear. They halted at Redwood's house; and when the British army drew near, Major Talbot, in obedience to orders, met and checked them. During the retreat, which was conducted with admirable tact, coolness, and daring, the light corps made every possible stand under cover of stone-fences and other incidental barriers, until supported by the main army, when the action became general. The commanding officer, in his dispatches to Congress, emphatically mentions the important services rendered the country, in this instance, by Major Talbot, in his speedy provision of the means of transportation for the troops, and the gallant defense he maintained as an officer of the light corps, in the safe and orderly retreat from the island.

His subsequent services, both military and naval, are fully described by Mr. Tuckerman, until his retirement from public duty, in 1801.—The volume closes with a discriminating sketch of

HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER.

In person, Commodore Talbot was tall and graceful, in features determined, but attractive. His conversation was spirited and genial. A few of the "troops of friends" that enjoyed his intimacy, yet recall the mingled hardihood and fascination of his appearance; and their remembrance is confirmed by the portrait belonging to his descendants in Kentucky, and painted by Benjamin West, in liquidation of a debt incurred in the artist's days of privation and, therefore, an interesting as well as an authentic memorial. His wheat-fields at Johnston were celebrated for their richness and extent; and the same energy displayed in battle and agriculture, he seems to have carried into social life, which was the chief resource of his declining years.

The natural heroism of Commodore Talbot is sufficiently illustrated by his revolutionary career, while attached to the army and navy. His social character was distinguished by a remarkable candor, a high and quick sense of honor, and a rare union of clear judgment with strong feeling. Although impulsive by temperament his will was firm and consistent. He educated himself through the judicious culture and noble direction of the gifts he had received from nature; and the habit of improving every occasion that presented itself to enlarge his knowledge. He was an accomplished gentleman, with a dignity of manners that stamped him for a leader; and yet with a frank urbanity of spirit that endeared him as a companion. He was thirteen times wounded, and carried five bullets in his body. In private life, the elegant hospitality he exercised, the ardor of his personal attachments, the winning grace and self-respect of his manners, his acquaintance with life in all its phases, and a certain generous nobility of feeling, rendered him, in his prime, one of the best specimens of a self-made American officer the country ever produced.—He died in the City of New York, on the 30th of June, 1813, and was buried under Trinity Church. No monument has been erected to his memory; but his gallant deeds are inscribed on the immortal record of the War of Independence; and his name enrolled among the patriotic heroes of America.

IMPORTANT INVENTION.—The Pittsburgh Commercial Journal says, that Mr. C. Evans, of that city, has invented and constructed, a neat apparatus for ascertaining at all times, the pressure of steam in steamboats and other boilers. It has been submitted to some practical engineers, and pronounced to be the best machine for the purpose hitherto devised. Its great merit is, that it is not all liable to be broke or damaged. Neither mercury nor glass is used.

PENNY POSTAGE.—In the year 1838, the whole number of letters delivered in Great Britain was 76,000,000. Last year, the annual delivery reached the prodigious number of 337,000,000.—Dickens says that the penny postage and steel pen may be regarded as among the most important features of progress in modern times.

More than six hundred laboring people have been thrown out of employment, in the vicinity of Baltimore, Md., by the stoppage of several cotton factories.

Shipwreck and Piracy on the Arabian Coast.

The following is an interesting account of the shipwreck of an English vessel on the coast of Arabia, and the capture and detention, or death of the Captain's wife and several of the crew, by the marauding Arabs:

"On the 3d of June, it appears, the Mary Florence, of Shields, Captain Short, bound to Aden, with coals made the highland off Cape Guardafui. When about nine miles to the north-east of the cape, the Captain bore for Aden. Between nine and ten o'clock, P. M. the vessel struck on a sand bank, and there being a heavy sea on, she drifted shorewards. Next morning some of the natives swam off to the vessel and appeared very friendly. Finding he could not get the vessel off, the master got an anchor ashore, and bent a hawser to it from the mast-head. On the second morning he commenced floating the stores on shore, sending to guard them his first and second mates, the steward and three seamen. Soon afterwards the natives came crowding to the beach, appearing to be all armed, and headed by a chief.—They pretended to be quite friendly, and the chief appointed a guard of his own people to protect the stores. Deceived by these appearances, the captain continued to send his stores ashore, until the great bulk of them were landed; and finally his unfortunate wife was sent ashore, by means of a sling.

The captain was about to follow, but it would appear as if the landing of the female was the signal for the Arabs to let loose all their worst passions. The poor woman was at once seized and carried away, and those of the crew on shore were attacked with spears and driven into the water. The chief mate shouted to the captain to come to the rescue of his wife, and the latter attempted to get out the pinnace. The rope broke, however, and the boat floated ashore. The natives tried to launch the pinnace, but owing to a very heavy surf, they did not succeed.—The hands on shore were seized.—The Arabs went to prayers—and immediately afterwards proceeded to plunder the stores. In this work they were employed all night, in the course of which the captain heard shrieks, but he never again saw anything of the unfortunate detenus.—Next morning the chief and his followers were seen strutting about in the articles of European clothing they had stolen. The captain and the remainder of his crew now proceeded to launch the long-boat, putting into her all the provisions that remained to them. They anchored about 300 yards outside the vessel, hoping to hear something of their unfortunate comrades.

In the meantime the natives gained the vessel by swimming, and proceeded effectually to break her up, carrying away by piece-meal the brass stanchions, sails, &c. They finally attempted to gain possession of the long boat, when the captain put to sea with a fair wind for Aden. On getting eighty miles up the coast, however, the wind veered to the north east, and the boat was obliged to put back. Some of the crew attempted to get in water at Cape Felix but were chased from the shore. About ten miles lower down, they succeeded in getting ten gallons, paying for the same with a gold watch and other valuables. They then ran down the coast of Africa, enduring great privation, the allowance of water being only one gill a day, with hardly anything to eat. On the 19th of June they anchored about 300 yards from the shore, within ten miles of a small bay in which the Dewan was lying, without, however, being aware of the proximity of the vessel.—This was about one hundred miles south-east of Cape Guardafui. Here the natives were very little better than those at the cape. They swam to the boat, searched for money, and took the chronometer, sextant, &c. One of the natives, who could speak a little English, however, informed the Captain that a vessel lay around the point. He immediately dispatched a note stating his circumstances. Mr. Jeffery replied, promising every aid in his power, and as soon as he could discover the position of the boat, which the Captain had forgotten to indicate, he proceeded overland to rescue his unfortunate countrymen.

In getting up the anchor to come ashore, a sudden squall struck the boat, and capsized her, when one of the seamen was unfortunately drowned. Those who could swim got on shore; others clung to the boat, the natives laughing and clapping their hands, and offering no assistance until the captain held out a reward of three Spanish dollars a head for every man they aided. On Jeffery's arrival he found the captain and his people in a state of starvation, and stripped of nearly everything. He purchased sheep, fowls, and rice, supplied their immediate wants, and complained to the chief of the people's conduct. But he found that the chief participated in

the plunder, and he was forced to ransom the boat for £4, of which sum it was understood that the chief's share was £3. Guns to the number of nine, the Arabs were unwilling to part with, and they kept the people prisoners until these, the sextant, and other articles were paid for. The natives satisfied, Mr. Jeffery got the people on board the schooner, and in two days sailed for Muscat. Here the captain preferred to wait for a passage direct to Bombay, the Dewan not being fitted for such a voyage.

The Bombay Government will doubtless dispatch a steamer to Cape Guardafui, the moment they get information of this deplorable case.—Those whom Mr. Jeffery was happy enough to rescue were received on board the Framjee Cowjee, at Muscat—the owner, Byramjee Maal, treating them with the utmost kindness. They also received every attention from the East India Company's agent, Heskell, described as an Arab Jew. The son of the Imam was also very kind, placing 120 Spanish dollars at the disposal of the shipwrecked people. Those saved by Mr. Jeffery consisted of Captain Short, (who was at Colombo a few years ago, in the Columbus), the carpenter, the cook, four seamen, and five apprentices. Those carried away by the Arabs were Mrs. Short (who had valuable jewelry, and about one hundred sovereigns in gold on her person,) the first and second mates, the steward and three seamen.

THE PATENT OFFICE.—In this building are deposited and exhibited specimens of American ingenuity, rare and extensive collections of plants, birds, minerals, shells, &c., and indeed a variety and sufficiency of everything curious, interesting and valuable, to make it, emphatically, a "great National show shop." With this collection and exhibition, every American citizen should be proud, and therewith, and with the building itself should be associated much of national feeling. The edifice is indeed a great national repository of the evidences of American ingenuity and invention, and of the varied, and beautiful, and rich productions of sea and land.

The corner-stone of this edifice was laid in 1836; it is of Grecian Doric architecture, with a portico of most imposing appearance. Its front is 270 feet, breadth in centre 127 feet and at the ends 70 feet. It is 65 feet high and the grand portico 95 feet front. It is built of sandstone, and cost \$417,000.

The design for the whole structure contemplates the erection of the other three sides, leaving an open court in the centre. The Eastern side is now in progress, and is 66 feet in width, by 272 in length. Its third story will consist of a single room, the ceiling of which will be 30 feet high, and the exterior sides of very white marble.

The foundation wall of the West wing has been laid, and will be four stories high by reason of the low ground on which it will stand. The Northern sides will not be commenced until the other sides are finished, and the West wing or side will not be further prosecuted until a further appropriation. When fully completed, it will be one of the noblest of national edifices.—*Cin. Gaz.*

POLITENESS.—The man who hesitates but a moment in giving his seat to a lady, possesses not one spark of politeness in his composition. The lady who under these circumstances takes a seat without expressing her acknowledgements to the giver, is wanting in that delicate appreciation of such trifling attentions, which every lady should possess.

The Boston Medical Journal says that "once a week is often enough to bathe the whole body for the purpose of luxury or cleanliness."

A bachelor friend of ours having committed matrimony, offers for sale his former stock of trade, viz: Two pairs of stockings with their heels out one mouldy candlestick, two dirty night caps, one stew pan, a few cold potatoes, two dummies without strings or buttons, a spavined flute and a single bedstead.

☞ A letter from San Francisco, of 31st August, mentions an invoice of House frames lately arrived there from Baltimore. Invoice cost, \$3,500; freight \$1200. They were sold to pay charges, and only brought \$550. This is not very favorable for shippers of houses.

☞ Pittsburgh has now two bodies of night-watchmen, one appointed by the Mayor, and the other by the Police Committee.